

# Teen Mental Health Problems: What Are The Warning Signs

*National Mental Health Information Center*

(NAPS)-The teen years can be tough for both parent and child. Adolescents are under stress to be liked, do well in school, get along with their family and make important life decisions. Most of these pressures are unavoidable and worrying about them is natural. But if your teen is feeling extremely sad, hopeless or worthless, these could be warning signs of a mental health problem.

Mental health problems are real, painful and can be severe. They can lead to school failure, loss of friends, or family conflict. Some of the signs that may point to a possible problem are listed below. If you are a Parent or other caregiver of a teenager, pay attention if your teen:

## **Is troubled by feeling:**

- very angry most of the time, cries a lot or overreacts to things;
- worthless or guilty a lot;
- anxious or worried a lot more than other young people;
- grief for a long time after a loss or death;
- extremely fearful-has unexplained fears or more fears than most kids;
- constantly concerned about physical problems or appearance;
- frightened that his or her mind is controlled or is out of control.

## **Experiences big changes, for example:**

- does much worse in school;
- loses interest in things usually enjoyed;
- has unexplained changes in sleeping or eating habits;
- avoids friends or family and wants to be alone all the time;
- daydreams too much and can't get things done;
- feels life is too hard to handle or talks about suicide;
- hears voices that cannot be explained.

## **Is limited by:**

- poor concentration; can't make decisions;
- inability to sit still or focus attention;
- worry about being harmed, hurting others, or about doing something "bad";
- the need to wash, clean things, or perform certain routines dozens of times a day;
- thoughts that race almost too fast to follow;
- persistent nightmares.

## **Behaves in ways that cause problems, for example:**

- uses alcohol or other drugs;
- eats large amounts of food and then forces vomiting, abuses laxatives, or takes enemas to avoid weight gain;
- continues to diet or exercise obsessively although bone-thin;

- often hurts other people, destroys property, or breaks the law;
- does things that can be life threatening.

To find help, discuss your concerns with your teen's teacher, school counselor or others such as a family doctor, psychiatrist, psychologist, social worker, religious counselor or nurse.

Free information about children's and adolescent's mental health is available through the CARING FOR EVERY CHILDS MENTAL HEALTH: Communities Together national public education campaign of the Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS), Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Call SAMHSA's National Mental Health Information Center at 1-800-789-2647, (TDD) 866-889-2647.

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